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REPACKAGING GRAND NARRATIVE: FROM NARRATIVE TO DATABASE IN THE REMAKES OF
SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO AND MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

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College Honors Thesis Final Draft

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ABSTRACT

The past twenty years have seen significant shifts in patterns of digital media consumption which reflect the fracturing and proliferation of narratives characteristic of postmodernity. Japanese scholar Hiroki Azuma described these shifts in 2001 as characteristic of an “Era of Animals,” in which grand narratives have broken down and given way to a new form of non-narrative. Azuma’s work focused on emerging forms of media and anime-related products, but the contemporary moment is now far deeper in this “Era of Animals.” This project will examine a different set of animated media that have appeared since the release of Azuma’s study: remakes of foundational anime from the 1970s. By specifically comparing the fictionalized grand narratives of 1970s anime to their remade forms in the postmodern, this thesis will address the status of fictionalized grand narratives in the contemporary *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Gundam* franchises, and reveal the ways in which grand narratives break down, and are maintained, in postmodern otaku-oriented anime.

INTRODUCTION

Opening Statements

Two classics of 1970s Japanese animation, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*) and the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* (*Kidou senshi Gandamu*) both hold the distinction of having their original stories revitalized, through direct remake or return to the original canon, in the last few years. The year 2013 saw the return of the celebrated *Space Battleship Yamato* with its remake *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* (*Uchū senkan Yamato 2199*). The following year saw the *Gundam* franchise return to its original canon timeline for the first time since 1994, with *Gundam: Reconguista in G* (*Gandamu G no rekongisuta*). Both of these franchises are widely known examples of Japanese popular culture both in Japan and around the world. While both are colossal franchises each comprised of numerous television series, movies, video games adaptations, and other media, these last few years have presented a distinct historical moment in which both have returned to their core stories.

Remakes provide a unique opportunity to study how both media, and audiences, change over time. There are several reasons why a franchise might produce a remake over new content. It could be an attempt to improve the original, reach out to new fans, revitalize a franchise, adapt to new technology, or to try and recapture the old magic that led to the success of the original. Regardless of the reason, by their very definition remakes involve a gulf of time between the remade and original installments. Differences between a remake and its original may be able to reveal to us not only a simple shift in plot or thematic elements, but also possibly even greater shifts in media consumption patterns or overall social change. While fans worldwide sometimes decry remakes for spoiling or besmirching the legacy of the original, remakes can provide a

distinct opportunity to study the social, cultural, and media-consumption trends which shape how original content is remolded and transformed to accommodate changing consumer tastes and fads.

Theory

In this thesis, the study of remakes will join another, more abstract field: the study of postmodernity. The reason why these dates- 1974, 1979, 2013, and 2014- are so significant is due to their location in an overall timeline of postmodernity. According to some postmodern scholars, postmodernity is divisible into several phases. The *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Gundam* franchises began during one phase of postmodernization, and were remade or returned to their original canon (respectively) in the next. As such, examining the differences between these originals and remakes provides valuable information about some of the more concrete effects of this shift into postmodernity.

Japanese media scholar Hiroki Azuma, in his 2001 foundational treatise *Animalizing Postmodernity* (*Doubutsuka suru posutomodan*¹) describes in particular Japan's transition into the postmodern as, though beginning much later than other parts of the world, having progressed at a significantly more rapid rate (Azuma 2009: 74). As such, Azuma's work situates Japan as an ideal case study for examining postmodernity. Azuma's work, building on the ideas of other scholars such as Eiji Ōtsuka² and Masachi Ōsawa, has provided a functional timeline for the development of Japanese postmodern media, and terms for the main eras that comprise it. The "Era of Ideals" (1945-1970) represents the beginnings of Japan's postmodernity where grand narratives were still fully functioning (Azuma 2009: 72). The "Era of Fictions" (1970-1995)

¹ Translated as "Otaku: Japan's Database Animals" in 2009. This will be referenced in-text as (Azuma 2009).

² Ōtsuka wrote his original research in Japanese in 1989, but was only published in English through Mechademia in 2010. This will be referenced in-text as (Ōtsuka 2010). It is important to remember that, while Ōtsuka's work was translated after Azuma's, it significantly predates all of Azuma's related work.

identifies the period before the complete postmodern, where these grand narratives³ were declining, yet still desired; as such they were maintained as fictions through the setting and worldview of small narratives. Finally the “Era of Animals” (1995-present) represents the period following the decline and breakdown of grand narratives, and is characterized by a “database” (Azuma 2009: 73) of affective elements- components of media which elicit emotional response from their consumers and provide the motivation for media consumption. In the “Era of Animals,” a new form of consumption is born: “database consumption.”

Statement of Research Question

Postmodern scholars and critics such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Masachi Ōsawa, and Hiroki Azuma have characterized postmodernization as a transition away from grand narrative storytelling. Given Japan’s significantly rapid rate of postmodernization, Japanese media is uniquely well-suited to be used as a lens through which to understand the phenomena of postmodernity, and it has been: over the past three decades many scholars in this field have conducted research into postmodernity using Japanese anime and manga, consumer products and merchandise, as well as American comic books (Brienza 2012: 213).

Hiroki Azuma published his signature work, *Animalizing Postmodernity*, over a decade ago and some of the classic franchises he cites have recently been, or are in the process of being, remade deep within this “Era of Animals.” Additionally, significant shifts have taken place in the Japanese anime industry, fan behavior, and patterns of consumption, especially in conjunction with the growth of the internet and digital media. This project will examine and analyze the transformations and continuities between anime classics from the pre-postmodern to remakes of those media released during the postmodern, with particular focus on grand narrative and

³ Culturally-significant metanarratives, described in more detail in the following chapter.

affective elements. What happens to the fictional grand narratives found in the original *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* storylines when they are reimagined in the “Era of Animals?” Are these fictional grand narratives completely displaced in favor of database elements that characterize Otaku anime created in the “Era of Animals?” This project will investigate these questions by closely examining two anime franchises that have been closely associated with otaku⁴ culture in Japan, the *Gundam* series and the *Space Battleship Yamato* franchise. According to Azuma, the fictional grand narratives of media from the “Era of Fictions” no longer exist in the postmodern “Era of Animals.” However, as this thesis demonstrates, they have not disappeared entirely; they have become part of the database of affective elements from which postmodern narratives are constructed. Fictional grand narratives are still present but no longer underpin the themes and cultural import of media, their imagery and elements have been repackaged as database elements: easily visible, infinitely reproducible, and with their original meaning weakened and attenuated.

Description of Thesis Structure

This thesis is comprised of three major conceptual sections. First, it will explain the background and context of the major theories involved, primarily this will detail works which involve the analysis of anime and narrative consumption. In addition, this section will illustrate the conceptual timeline of postmodernity developed in the 1990s-2000s used by many scholars today. It will illustrate the reasons why *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* were chosen for this project, as well as provide background and a brief introduction into each franchise. Second, the nature of anime in the “Era of Fictions” will be explained, with special

⁴ A term which general refers to an obsessive anime fan or hobbyist, for whom their hobby is a major part of their identity.

focus on the work of Eiji Ōtsuka concerning the development of small-narrative storytelling in the 1980s. Following this, textual analysis of *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*. will constitute the majority of the section. It will identify scenes and themes of analytic value in order to explain their significance to the media and their relation to the fictional grand narratives backgrounded⁵ in each show. The third section of this thesis will explain the nature of anime in the “Era of Animals” via the work of Hiroki Azuma and other contemporary scholars. In addition, the contemporary remakes and re-imaginings of the previous two shows, *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* and *Gundam: Reconguista in G* respectively, will be compared with their 1970s counterparts, paying special attention to the fate of the fictional grand narratives found in their 1970s originals.

⁵ There is some disagreement between Azuma and Ōtsuka regarding these terms, this dispute will be addressed in the following section.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Grand Narrative and Modernity

In the introduction to his 1979⁶ landmark treatise “The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,” French scholar Jean-Francois Lyotard writes that,

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives... [they are] being dispersed into clouds of narrative language elements: narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. (Lyotard 1984: xxiv)

In his analysis Lyotard defines postmodernism as fundamental human disbelief and rejection of the metanarrative apparatus, grand narratives so great in scope and cultural import they hold the power to legitimate knowledge (Lyotard 1984). In other words, pre-postmodern human knowledge made sense as it comported with understood and assumed metanarrative. The postmodern represents the state of society after fundamental confidence in the meaning and legitimacy of these metanarratives have been lost.

While Lyotard worked in France and dealt almost exclusively with Western philosophical and literary culture, his work has been adapted and re-applied around the globe. Within the context of the study of media, within the past thirty years Lyotard’s work has made a significant impact on scholarship in Japan regarding Japanese media.

⁶ Translated as “The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,” in 1984. As such, this will be referenced in-text as (Lyotard 1984).

Postmodernity

Both Azuma and Lyotard provide several examples of ideas they would consider grand narratives. The examples they provide include “[science as] the emancipation of humanity” (Lyotard 1984: 60) and religious inquiries into the metaphysical and spiritual as identified in Lyotard’s work, and other scholars have identified broad grand-narrative trends such as (ancient) Greek fatalism and Christian redemptionism (Oxford Reference 2016). Azuma himself labels a few grand narratives as “intellectually the ideas of humanity and reason, politically as the nation-state and revolutionary ideologies, and economically as the primacy of production” (Azuma 2009: 28)

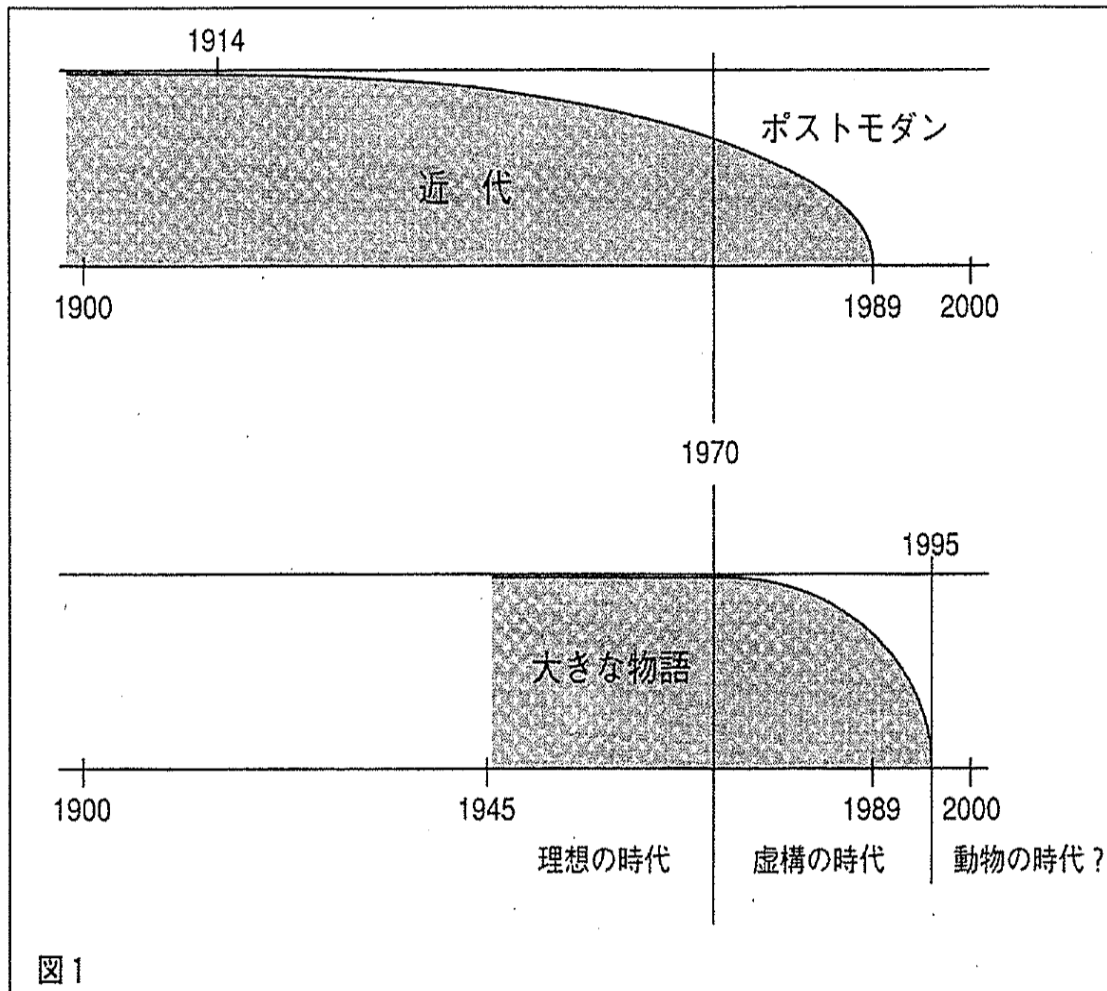
In order to draw distinctions between the Azuma’s framework of the pre-postmodern, periods of postmodernization, and the postmodern itself, many factors must be understood: what kinds of grand narratives existed, where, how and why they declined, and the benchmarks that divide these eras. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on postmodernity in Japan, as primarily put forward by Hiroki Azuma and Eiji Ōtsuka.

A New Japanese Framework

In his 2003 essay⁷ “The Animalization of Otaku Culture” Hiroki Azuma provides a clear graphic of the conceptual timeline for the breakdown of grand narratives in Japan (see figure 1, page 10) (Azuma 2007: 179).⁸

⁷ Translated as “The Animalization of Otaku Culture” in 2007. As such, this will be cited in-text as (Azuma 2007).

⁸ The graphic does not appear in his 2009 book, as such the 2007 essay on the same topic is cited here.



The upper portion of the diagram shows Azuma's extremely general projection of the global trend of postmodernization. The shaded portion is labeled "modern" (*kindai*), and the unshaded "postmodern" (*posutomodan*). While the above diagram indicates grand narratives as beginning to break down during the modern period, Azuma maintains that "modernity was ruled by the grand narrative" (Azuma 2009: 28) He identifies the most significant global trend in postmodernization as occurring from before World War One in 1914, and reaching what might be considered full postmodernization by just before the 1990s. The lower diagram shows the postmodernization of Japan, represented as a much more rapid, though later, transformation. The shaded portion is labeled "grand narratives," and the unshaded section indicates postmodernity.

The timeline is divided into three distinct categories seen at the bottom of the diagram. The left most reads “The Era of Ideals” (*risou no jidai*), in the center “The Era of Fictions” (*kyokou no jidai*) and the right most “The Era of Animals” (*doubutsu no jidai*). Azuma’s translator, Marc Steinberg, writes that according to the diagram “...between 1970 and 1995, the grand narratives underpinning the modern nation gradually collapsed. This period corresponds to the ‘Era of Fictions.’ The ‘Era of Animals’ is Japan’s period of complete postmodernization” (Azuma 2007: 179). In summary, the period of the pre-postmodern is known as the “Era of Ideals,” the “Era of Fictions” is the period of postmodernization, and the “Era of Animals” is the period following the total breakdown of grand narratives.

The “Era of Ideals”

According to Ōsawa and Azuma, in Japan the breakdown of grand narratives began in 1945 (three decades into the global era of postmodernization). This significant year marks the date of the surrender of the Empire of Japan and the beginning of the era of American occupation. Claiming this date as the start of Japan’s descent into the postmodern is no coincidence. Postmodernity is defined as the period following the breakdown of grand narrative, and 1945 represented a dramatic shattering of the Japanese cultural metanarrative. In her analysis of Japanese postwar culture titled *The Long Defeat*, Akiko Hashimoto writes, “after the national collapse of 1945, many reacted to the abrupt inversion of moral order... by reverting back to a realist moral relativism” (Hashimoto 2015: 7). In many ways, this “abrupt inversion of moral order” rings similar to Lyotard’s assertion that metanarratives (grand narratives) “obsolesce” following a “crisis of metaphysical philosophy” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Azuma writes that the grand narratives were “severed at once by the defeat of 1945. Conversely, from the period of

reconstruction to the period of high growth, Japan surmounted dangers by restoring grand narratives...” (Azuma 2009: 74). Azuma notes that this led to a twenty-five year period in which grand narratives were emphasized by social and legal means, and this “Era of Ideals” was characterized by increased demand for grand narrative media. While this was the last era of grand narrative storytelling, it was also an era in which grand narratives were propped up in the face of their existential decline. Azuma notes, “The result for Japan was that the process [of postmodernization] began again in earnest, but at a much quicker pace” (Azuma 2009: 74). In summary, the “Era of Ideals” was a period between 1945 and 1970 in which the grand narratives of the past (the modern period) continued during the context of greater global postmodernization.

The “Era of Fictions”

If assumption of, and belief in, grand narratives defined the “Era of Ideals,” then the “Era of Fictions” was one in which the nature of such grand narratives was changing rapidly. For Azuma, the 1970s failed communist revolution in Japan by the Japanese Red Army- the “Red Army Incident”- was the defining moment that led to the “Era of Fictions.” Azuma writes, “The Japanese Red Army aimed at realizing certain ideals, namely revolution which did not in fact lead to social transformation but instead increasingly descended into delusion. It finally ended in factionalist infighting... an event that embodied the impasse of the Era of Ideals yet was already stepping into the Era of Fiction” (Azuma 2007: 178). This, for Azuma, showed that grand narratives had lost their power and place in culture, and were rapidly diminishing. Eiji Ōtsuka writes of this time period⁹ that a particular and unique form of narrative consumption had been born (Ōtsuka 2010).

⁹ It is significant to note that Ōtsuka’s scholarship actually predates the use of the phrase “Era of Fictions.” Ōtsuka himself, in his scholarship, refers to the time period as an ‘Era of Narrative Consumption,’ a term now rarely used.

This strange form of consumption can in fact be seen particularly clearly in the commodities of comics and anime or even toys... Be they comics or toys, these commodities are not themselves consumed. Rather, what is consumed first and foremost, and that which first gives these individual commodities their very value, is the grand narrative or order that they hold in partial form and as their background. Moreover, it is by convincing consumers that through the repetition of this very act of consumption they grow closer to the totality of the grand narrative that the sales of countless quantities of the same kind of commodity become possible. (Ōtsuka 2010: 107)

The “repetition of the very act of consumption,” as he mentions, is most often the consumption of an individual installment of a comic or television series. This is to say that, in this era of narrative consumption described by Ōtsuka, small narratives (episodes or installments) had come to occupy the space between consumers and grand narratives, operating as a kind of lens through which to observe a grand narrative in the background of media (Ōtsuka 2010).

Hiroki Azuma describes the era as “one in which grand narratives had broken down yet were constructed as fictions” (Azuma 2007: 178). As Azuma states, the grand narratives obtainable through this ‘narrative consumption’ were not true cultural metanarratives, but rather fictional constructs. Created by production companies and marketers, these ‘fictional grand narratives’ sated a deep human need for grand truths, hijacking this desire to sell these vast and imagined fictions. As such, the “Era of Fictions” was one in which grand narratives have all but disappeared, but continue to exist as fictions,¹⁰ persisting behind screens of small narratives and only accessible through mass consumption of those small narratives. It is important to note that here Ōtsuka’s and Azuma’s ideas and terminology differ somewhat; Ōtsuka states that grand

¹⁰ Azuma refers to these ‘fictional grand narratives’ simply as “fictions” in some parts of his work.

narratives still existed in the background of narrative media during the 1970s-1980s, however Azuma argues that these were fictions, constructs of worldview and setting that simulated grand narratives yet were ultimately fictions. Given Ōtsuka's perspective in his own period he saw these worldviews and settings as grand narratives, however in Azuma's retrospect he reveals these simply to be fictions, maintained by misdirected otaku desire for grand narratives. As such, in this thesis, Lyotard's metanarrative(s) will be referred to as 'grand narrative,' while these constructs of the "Era of Fictions" will be termed 'fictional grand narrative.' Azuma's term "worldview and setting" will be avoided, however, in order to emphasize the critical point that it was the "Era of Fictions" desire for grand narrative storytelling which launched this kind of media into such popularity.

The drive to consume grand narrative in whatever form is what impels "Era of Fictions" narrative consumption. Some anime, such as long-running series like the *Gundam* franchise and *Macross* (*Makurosu*, 1982), produce their own colossal and richly-imagined internal fictional grand narratives in order to meet the desires for the grand narratives that were vanishing from society in general. Other franchises, such as the *Space Battleship Yamato* series, fictionalize actual extant historical events that were undergirded by grand narratives and sells them as fiction. In both cases, grand narrative as fiction becomes the object of consumption in this period, and the vehicle for consumers' understanding is the mass of small narratives behind which they exist in the background.

The "Era of Animals"

The final and most contemporary period is the "Era of Animals," the period referred to as the 'postmodern.' Similar to how the "Era of Fictions" began with the failure of the Japanese

Red Army in 1970, the “Era of Animals” also began with a dramatic incident. Azuma points to the 1995 sarin gas attacks at two Tokyo subway stations by the radical Japanese religious group Aum Shinrikyo as the general start for Japan’s true postmodern period. Azuma explains that,

“...the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Metro by members of Aum Shinrikyo in 1995 is the very image of revolution as fiction. In short, it was a revolutionary movement as fiction insofar as the young people who carried it out were under the influence of Uchu senkan Yamato (Space Battleship Yamato, a.k.a. Star Blazers) or Kido senshi Gundam (Mobile Suits Gundam) or else New Age thought. What struck me about the media coverage surrounding Aum Shinrikyo was the revelation of their heavy use of drugs, how the sect used drugs and electronic devices to brainwash people. You may recall how much media attention fell on techniques of mind control. Simply put, the fundamental idea behind mind control is the treatment of people as animals.” (Azuma 2007: 178)

This moment marked not only the extent of such fictions within society, but also marks the point where Azuma connects postmodernization to “animalization,” from which his term “Era of Animals,” takes its name. His idea of “animalization” actually stems from Alexander Kojève’s concept of dehumanization, in which “people come to use cultural products for the immediate satisfaction of needs without searching for or desiring profound underlying meaning from them” (Azuma 2009: xvi). Azuma concludes his analysis with the observation that,

Considered in this light, Aum Shinrikyo appears not only to extend the worldview of fiction but also to constitute a revolutionary collective that viewed humans as

animals... in short, the Aum Shinrikyo that became visible in 1995 had one foot in the Era of Fiction¹¹ and the other in the Era of Animals. (Azuma 2007: 178)

The “Era of Animals” is best characterized as one in which grand narratives have completely broken down. In their place the small narratives, once vehicles for the understanding of a broader fictional grand narrative, become consumed in increased quantity. Via mass consumption of these small narratives consumers become aware not of a grand narrative, but rather a vast database of tropes- visual, aural, and thematic- which comprise those small narratives. Storytelling in the “Era of Animals” becomes the combination of these tropes, which Azuma terms “affective elements” (*moe yoso*), into vast simulacra. This is “database consumption,” the core of Azuma’s argument.

With the breakdown of these grand narratives, the desire to consume them (which supported the production of fictional grand narratives during the “Era of Fictions”) has disappeared entirely as well. This loss of desire forms an important detail in Azuma’s argument; he explains that “the younger generations that grew up within the postmodern world imagine the world as a database from the beginning, since they do not need a perspective on the entire world that surveys all- that is to say, they have no need for forgeries...” (Azuma 2009: 38). By “forgeries,” Azuma is referring to the fictional grand narratives which declined by the end of the “Era of Fictions,” paving the way for the new “Era of Animals” in 1995.

In Azuma’s observation, character traits are most easily viewed as examples of affective elements, and examples include cat ears, maid outfits, certain eye and hair colors (Azuma 2009: 43), and so on. Other examples include particular settings and character archetypes (Azuma 2009: 42). Consumer enjoyment and meaning is derived from these database elements in the

¹¹ Note that some authors prefer “Era of Fiction” while some prefer “Era of Fictions,” and so on. In most cases this is due to the translation of that phrase from Japanese, which lacks the plural form. For continuity, this thesis will use the plural.

“Era of Animals,” rather than from the connection of small narratives to vast fictional grand narratives.

Summary

In summary, Azuma’s periodization of the process of postmodernization in Japan consists of three eras that begin later, but proceed more rapidly, than global forms of postmodernization. The pre-postmodern (before the “Era of Ideals”) was one in which grand narratives were widely produced, assumed, and understood. In the first of the three periods, the “Era of Ideals,” in the face of increasing postmodernism, these grand narratives slowly began to lose power and break down. As grand narratives began to decline more rapidly in the second period, the “Era of Fictions,” grand narratives were built as fictions and remained in the background of media, accessible through mass consumption. Finally, in the “Era of Animals,” both the existence of and the desire for these grand narratives has disappeared entirely in the examples provided by Azuma, and are replaced by a vast database of affective elements that have themselves become the objects of consumption.

Terminology

This thesis uses a number of terms related to the word “narrative” that draw from various articles and scholarship. When I refer to “narrative” I am talking about a story, most usually a story or plot which structures a piece of media. In this sense “narrative” contrasts with media with no underlying story, or “non-narrative” products. Episodic or skit-based media would not be considered narrative media in this usage. “Grand narrative” refers to a cultural story or ideology so powerful and widespread within a given culture or society that it legitimates knowledge and

the worldviews of members of that culture. While Lyotard also refers to such stories as “metanarrative,” using the two terms (grand narrative and metanarrative) synonymously, this thesis will only use the term “metanarrative” when indicating and discussing Lyotard’s work. Contrasting with grand narrative is “small narrative,” which both Azuma and Ōtsuka identify significantly in their work. “Small narrative” indicates the actual, concrete story of a piece of media, such as a single text, film, or episode of television. “Small narrative” is similar to the common usage of the word “narrative,” however, within this thesis it describes a single concrete piece of media, rather than an abstract story. “Fictional grand narrative,” highly important to this thesis, refers to a false grand narrative produced during the “Era of Fictions,” not a narrative of cultural importance but a fiction produced to sate desire for grand narratives in an era where the importance of true grand narratives was fading rapidly.

Terminology related to the idea of “database” is also significant. “Database,” as used by Azuma, describes the vast array of elements (character designs, story elements, settings, and so on¹²) which comprise postmodern narratives (Azuma 2009: 47). Azuma terms these as “affective elements,” somewhat similar to the common word “trope,” but nuanced in that affective elements provide the motivation for narrative consumption. Azuma writes, “each element, with its own origins and background, constitutes a category that has been developed in order to stimulate the interest of consumers. It is not a simple fetish object, but a sign that emerged through market principles” (Azuma 2009: 42). Consumers are affected by these elements, and consumers are motivated to consume media with similar elements to elicit similar emotions. When this thesis makes references to the word “trope,” the concept of the “affective element” is contained within.

¹² When describing different kinds of database elements, Azuma draws from various sources including anime characters, company marketing, and video game software.

To clarify the idea of the affective element, character traits provide a particularly compelling example. Postmodern anime in particular tends to differentiate characters using outlandish or boldly-colored hair, for example. Characters hairstyles are often linked to the color of their hair, with blue hair connected with intelligence, red with rashness, pink with cuteness, silver with maturity, and so on. Light blue representing “quiet personality [and] mysterious power” (Azuma 2009: 52) has become a widespread trope with the popularity of Neon Genesis Evangelion (*Shin seiki Evangerion*, 1995). These hairstyles are not the property of any one particular series or franchise, but are spread across a number of different series. Viewers who enjoy a particular series with a red-haired character may be inspired to consume other content with red-haired characters; the motivation for this “database consumption” in this case is not narrative but rather character design elements. Azuma expands the catalogue of database elements by noting that most “are visual, but there are other kinds of [database] elements, such as particular ways of speaking, settings, stereotypical narrative development, and the specific curves of a figurine” (Azuma 2009: 42). Mentioning “the specific curves of a figurine” in the same class as “narrative development” truly reinforces the dramatic shift of postmodernity. The section in which he explains this phenomenon is tellingly titled “Narratives and Coffee Mugs as the Same Class of Merchandise” (Azuma 2009: 39).

Postmodernity through Anime

The research of Japanese scholars who have examined postmodernity in Japan such as Azuma, Ōtsuka, and Ōsawa, have focused on three general areas: anime, manga, and toys marketed toward children. Otaku communities heavily consume all three, and overlaps between these have become the basis of large amounts of scholarship in the field. However, the focus of

this research is on (small) narrative and database, and the shifts these have undergone over the course of the last four or five decades. With that in mind, the weekly-airing, perennially reimagined media of anime makes an ideal focus for this kind of research. In addition, its extreme popularity in Japan and around the world has produced hundreds of millions of fans worldwide, as well as a large output of both anime and franchise media and merchandise.

The last five years has provided excellent opportunities to study not only anime, but more specifically reimagined and remade anime as well. As generations of anime fans and otaku age and the technology of animation improves audio and visual quality, remakes and reimaginings of popular anime are becoming more and more common. As a marketing tool nostalgia is a powerful force, and this is increasingly visible as anime from the 1990s (and sometimes earlier) have begun being remade in recent years. Normally, remakes appear as one of two kinds: remakes of individual shows within a larger franchise, and franchises that produce similar content or installments every year. Examples of the former include recent remakes of *Sailor Moon* (*Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn*, 1992) and *Lupin III* (*Rupan sansei*, 1972). The latter involves franchises that periodically reimagine themselves, releasing similar stories with new characters or blurring the canon with non-canonical movies or spin-offs featuring the main characters. Series such as *Dragon Ball* (*Doragon bōru*, 1986) fit this description, and one of the longest-running examples is that of the *Gundam* franchise. However, every franchise is different and these are often difficult to categorize. The increase in shows and franchises that seek to capitalize on this nostalgia and hearken back to an earlier period in the history of anime make this an ideal moment to research remade anime. The analysis of remade anime allows for media from the “Era of Fictions” and the “Era of Animals” to be meaningfully compared, and in doing to the traits and characteristics of these two eras can be understood.

Selection Process

This thesis will examine two franchises of particular fame in the anime industry: *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*, both of which saw their first installment in the 1970s during the early days of the “Era of Fictions.” The past three years, since early 2013, has seen the remarkable resurgence in popularity of the *Space Battleship Yamato* franchise; the genesis for this thesis began with the 2013 release of the remake *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*. In terms of sheer popularity- television ratings, movie tickets sold, merchandise, as well as in the work of many scholars- the *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Gundam* franchises count as two of the most successful otaku anime of the period from the 1970s to early 1990s. The *Gundam* franchise is one of anime’s longest running, releasing new series’ and spin-off material every year since 1979, continuing to this day. With a new *Gundam* series airing nearly every year, remakes and reimaginings are hardly uncommon- however, the release of *Gundam: Reconquista in G* (*Gandamu: G no rekongisuta*) in 2014 marked the first time since 1994 that the *Gundam* franchise saw a televised installment which returned to the franchise’s original canon.¹³ While the 2013 *Space Battleship Yamato* installment is a remake and *Gundam: Reconquista in G* is only a sequel to the franchise’s original canon, both series’ represent significant additions to their respective franchises which update material from the “Era of Fictions” to the postmodern “Era of Animals.”

¹³ Between 1979 and 1994, the *Gundam* franchise followed a close canon. From 1995 onward however, *Gundam* no longer follows that canon and instead reimagines new and different stories following core themes and settings.

CHAPTER 2: THE “ERA OF FICTIONS”

The Age of Small Narratives

In their scholarship both Eiji Ōtsuka and Hiroki Azuma directly assert the existence (Azuma 2009: 12; Ōtsuka 2010: 107) of grand narrative in the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*,¹⁴ but what is actually present? In the earlier work of Jean-Francois Lyotard he identifies such colossal metanarratives¹⁵ as the redemptionism in Christian philosophy and the power of science to liberate humanity. However, in the “Era of Fictions,” according to Azuma it is not these sorts of grand narratives which can be obtained through the mass-consumption of small narratives; rather, grand narratives ‘as fiction’ become the object of consumption. On those born in the “Era of Fictions,” Azuma writes, “this particular generation was driven to forge the grand narrative that had been lost” (Azuma 2009: 35). As such, a variety of fictional grand narratives exists in this period, from fully artificial fictional grand narratives to real events recast as fictional grand narratives.

The 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* exemplifies the former, as this thesis will detail later on. The series maintains in its background a colossal and fleshed-out fictional grand narrative of a spacefaring world, complete with detailed geopolitical relations, mechanical data, and grim realism.

An example of the latter, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*, as its name hints, draws heavily from the Japanese experience of militarism, tragedy, and victimization during the Pacific War. This real, authentic experience is fictionalized through *Space Battleship Yamato*, and through thorough consumption of the media a viewer can understand this fictionalized grand narrative of the Japanese experience of the Pacific War.

¹⁴ Grand narrative in one form or another. Ōtsuka refers to true grand narrative, while Azuma terms this a fictional grand narrative.

¹⁵ These grand narratives are also used by Azuma, referencing Lyotard’s work.

Space Battleship Yamato, Introduction

One of the most famous anime produced in the 1970s, *Space Battleship Yamato* is well-known for its rousing adventure and unique aesthetics. Combined with its nuanced views of nationalism and iconic images from the Pacific War, this 1974 science-fiction classic has left its mark on anime history. Initially released in 1974 under the direction of Leiji Matsumoto¹⁶ and produced by Yoshinobu Ishizaki, *Space Battleship Yamato* was initially planned for a longer airing than 26 episodes, but was cut in length partway into its release due to low ratings and lack of popularity. While the finished 26-episode series received some acclaim and a cult following, it was not until the release of the 1977 compilation movie (of the same name) when *Space Battleship Yamato* exploded into popularity. From that point forward the franchise has added numerous sequels, installments, novelizations, and video game expansions. It also achieved significant cult fame in the United States via the localized release titled “Star Blazers,” which aired in English in 1979.

Regardless of the year or installment, every release in the *Space Battleship Yamato* franchise revolves around the same general (and in many ways, baffling) premise: in the far future, Earth comes under attack by alien forces bent on the destruction of human life. In a final attempt to save humanity, the Japanese government outfits the rusting hulk of the Imperial Japanese Navy’s 1937¹⁷ super-battleship Yamato with advanced interstellar drives and powerful alien weaponry. This new “Space Battleship” Yamato must take to the stars, defeat the alien menace, and save the human race.

¹⁶ Leiji Matsumoto prefers to stylize his name with an L.

¹⁷The hull for the IJN Yamato was laid down in 1937, and she completed sea trials in 1941.

The franchise draws heavily on the historical context of the battleship Yamato. Built to be the largest and most heavily-armed battleships in the world, the two¹⁸ Yamato-class super-battleships (led by their name ship IJN Yamato) directly flouted the Washington Naval Treaty (which restricted the size and number of Japanese capital ships) and were designed to showcase Japanese industrial technology, engineering prowess, and military might. While at the time no warship in the world could match her heavy armor or firepower, the Yamato was ultimately rendered obsolete as aircraft carriers and naval air power began to dominate the naval engagements of the Second World War. While she took almost no part in the war, she was sunk by American air attack while en route to Okinawa during Operation Ten-go; the Yamato had been sent on a one-way mission to the island to hold back the American invasion force. While her wartime service was hardly glorious, her name “Yamato” was steeped in cultural importance. Japanese literature scholar Susan Napier writes, “Its name itself consciously refers to Japan, since ‘Yamato’ was the ancient name for Japan and warriors were urged to have *Yamatodamashii* (Yamato spirit). Equally important, the ship bore the final hopes of warding off, or at least slowing the advance of invading Americans on the eve of the battle of Okinawa” (Napier 2005: 2). In this sense, the sinking of the Yamato bore enormous cultural impact in Japan.

The Yamato remains in popular imagination in Japan and around world through film, television, and historical documentation, and it persists as a powerful symbol in Japanese anime to this day; thanks in no small part to the massive surge in popularity of *Space Battleship Yamato*.

The 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* is, at its heart, a space adventure story. It follows the story of the heroic and resilient crew of the Yamato as they fight from planet to planet, crossing the galaxy on their quest to save the Earth from alien attack. The Yamato is reconstructed from

¹⁸ Three ships were planned, but one was converted to an aircraft carrier partway into production.

the hull of the IJN Yamato, and engages enemy Gamilas forces throughout the Solar System before departing for the planet Iscandar, far from the Milky Way galaxy. Though the crew of the Yamato encounter significant enemy resistance as they fight across space, they are able to reach Iscandar and retrieve a device that can cure the Earth of Gamilas radiation. However, the Gamilas homeworld is in the same system as Iscandar, and the Yamato's crew are forced to destroy Gamilas and all of its inhabitants, a massacre of an unimaginable scale. The Yamato finally returns to Earth, which can become green and whole again.

As a product of the "Era of Fictions," the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* contains a distinct fictional grand narrative, which the viewer may access through the consumption of the twenty-six episodes of the series. Like other products of that era, *Space Battleship Yamato's* fictional grand narrative is just that, a fiction: not a true metanarrative of Japanese culture, but rather a fictional construct created to sate "Era of Fictions" desire for grand narrative storytelling in a period when true grand narratives were rapidly declining. In the case of *Space Battleship Yamato*, the anime's core story is a fictionalized reimagining of the Japanese experience of the Pacific War. A post-war product created decades after the conflict, and set centuries after it, *Space Battleship Yamato* conveys not only the rousing militarism and patriotism of the pre-war and early-war eras, but also the heaviness of defeat in the late-war period, the specter of nuclear annihilation, and the rawness of victimization in the late-war period. As such, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* contains a fictionalized grand narrative of the Japanese Pacific War experience based on two converging themes: the militarism, patriotism, and drive to war of the early-war period, and the narratives of defeat and desire for peace of the late-war and post-war periods. However, no scene in *Space Battleship Yamato* strictly engages one of these trends or the other; each scene involves different aspects of both, creating a story in which each episode

offers a glimpse of a different part of the fictionalized Pacific War-experience, and ultimately the Pacific War is constructed to be grand narrative as fiction.

Space Battleship Yamato, Argument

The Japanese experience of the Pacific War is powerfully visible at nearly every point in the series, and forms the fictional grand narrative of the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*. Recalling Azuma's argument for fictional grand narratives (Azuma 2009: 34), we must keep in mind that this grand narrative is neither an authentic account of the Japanese experience of the war, and nor are its allusions historically valid. However, every episode centers strongly on a literally-resurrected piece of Pacific War history, battles in space mirror real-world naval actions, space fighters make propeller-like sounds, and the terror of nuclear weapons is communicated with every lingering shot of the irradiated, red Earth. The series distinctly portrays, in a postmodernized and fictionalized manner, many aspects of the Japanese experience of the Pacific War.

As this fictional grand narrative is viewed through the fractured lens of small narratives, there is not an exact link between any particular episode and any particular theme or grand-narrative motif. Rather, many scenes portray differing aspects of the Japanese war experience, and it is through these myriad visions that the reader can construct their view of the fictional grand narrative behind *Space Battleship Yamato*. As the series' story is one of soldiers who fight for peace, there are two conflicting themes within *Space Battleship Yamato*. First is the militarism and ideology that drives men and women to war and justifies why they fight; in this sense, it recalls the ideologies that brought Japan to war with China and ultimately the Pacific War, and conveys the militarism and heady sense of victory in the Japanese Empire in the early

years of the war(s). Second is the heaviness and rawness of defeat, the brutality of loss and death, atomic annihilation, and the seeming inevitability of devastation which must accompany victory (and defeat); this trend recalls the Japanese experience of defeat at the hands of the Allied powers in 1945, as well the humiliation and victimization that followed. All of these elements ultimately comprise a vast, fictional grand narrative of the Japanese experience of the Pacific War.

The trend of militarism and the drive to war can possibly be best seen in the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*'s striking first and last arcs. In the show's opening scene, a human fleet sets out to strike back at the Gamilas invaders; however, the Gamilas starships all but wipe out the human fleet as their weapons prove useless against the powerful Gamilas armor. One small cruiser, the Yukikaze captained by young Mamoru Kodai, defies the order to retreat; Kodai tells his commanding officer that a man's duty is to "fight, fight, and destroy as many enemies as possible, and die."¹⁹ Kodai sails valiantly into the enemy fleet, destroying several enemy ships before enemy fire obliterates his vessel. This scene sets the tone for much of the show's portrayal of battlefield heroics- scenes of men doing their duty and striking against their enemies no matter the odds; these kinds of actions are performed both by the Yamato and her crew, and by their Gamilas foes. This opening scene is one of militarism tempered by the ultimate knowledge that these acts, while honorable and valiant, are ultimately futile. As the remnants of the human fleet return, the crew watches Gamilas radioactive "meteor bombs" headed for Earth, grimly recalling the meaninglessness of such valor in the face of atomic annihilation.

This scene thematically bookends the series with *Space Battleship Yamato*'s shocking final battle. The final arc of the series sees the Yamato finally arrive at the Iscandar system, only to find that the planet orbits the same star as the Gamilas homeworld. The maniacal Gamilas

¹⁹ From *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974), episode 1.

leader Deslar has set a number of traps for the Yamato, resulting in a savage life-or-death struggle across the surface of the Gamilas homeworld. In a final effort, the Yamato fires its ultimate weapon into the heart of a volcano, setting off a chain reaction that devastates the entire planet and ruins Gamilas civilization. As the ashes of their enemy's world rain down around them, Kodai breaks into tears on the Yamato's main deck, mourning that they have become those they wished to defeat, complicit in an atrocity greater than the attacks on Earth. Political science scholar Shunichi Takekawa writes that,

The Yamato becomes the victor, but has destroyed a planet and an empire in the process of winning. That is, the Yamato is also a victimiser, not simply a victim of Gamilas' aggression at the end. When Kodai Susumu notices what has happened to the Gamilas, he bemoans the deaths and destruction that the Yamato has caused. The Gamilas appears to be a metaphor for an Imperial Japan that could not give up the war until the very last moment, while the Yamato appears to be more like the United States that thoroughly destroyed major cities of Japan.

This episode is thus based on a bizarre transposition of reality. (Takekawa 2012: 10)

Through the series' focus on the fictional grand narrative of the Pacific War, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* is able to use this final battle to make a powerful claim; the Yamato's path to war closely mirrors the actions of the United States, fighting a drawn-out campaign across the Pacific which eventually resulted in the near-destruction of Japan. These final moments make a statement; had the Empire of Japan somehow been successful in the Pacific War, Japan would have become a victimizer on a scale equal to that of the United States. Victory and victimization go hand-in-hand, and the victors of war carry responsibility for the destruction they necessarily

cause. This juxtaposition serves to reconcile the narrative of war with the lessons learned from defeat. In the real world the lessons of defeat were learned only by the side that suffered near-annihilation resulting from the militarist war-narrative, however, in the fictional grand narrative of the Pacific War, total victory can lead to those same lessons. In other words, in the world of the fictional war-experience, the wartime narrative of victory can be reconciled with the lessons of the postwar.

Built into this fictional grand narrative is also the series' interrogation of the Pacific War (and more broadly, of World War Two) as a racially-driven conflict. Through much of the first half of the series it is made clearly aware to the viewer that the enemy, the soldiers and commanders of the Gamilas Empire, are humanoid and humanly-fallible. The failures and punishments of various incompetent Gamilas commanders become a running motif in the series, and many of the decisions to hold out or commit suicide via *kamikaze* attack by Gamilas leaders shows that both sides operate by on similar philosophical spectra. However the crew of the Yamato, by dramatic irony, are unaware of the fact that the people of the Gamilas Empire too are essentially human, and this revelation is one of the most shocking moments in the series. The crew of the Yamato, already thousands of light-years from home and battle-hardened, capture a Gamilas fighter pilot following one battle. The crew are shocked to learn that the Gamilas are humanoid, looking identical to humans except for their bluish skin. While the viewer is already aware of this fact Kodai is not, and vents his rage at this realization by attempting to kill the prisoner. In one of the most brutal scenes in the series, the two men grapple with a knife as Kodai struggles with the revelation that the Gamilas, too, are essentially human. This scene is an unsettling reminder of the racial nature of the Pacific War, but in the end the crew of the Yamato prove better than their historical counterparts and learn to understand their racial differences.

Through various episodes (small narratives) the Gamilas become a multifaceted enemy, a vehicle for portraying multiple aspects of the World War Two experience.²⁰ The names of the Gamilas themselves, and their dictatorial government, are reflective of Nazi Germany during the war, producing the counterfactual (but appealing) construction of a Japan at war with Germany. Ikuho Amano notes that “the oligarchs of the Gamilas Empire have pseudo-Germanic names that evoke images of Nazis officers... the metaphorical plot of the Japanese fight against Nazi Germany (re)makes the war as historically righteous; as such, the Earth Defense Army- the synonym of unified Japan itself- fictionally ‘affirms the past and present of the country.’ In this sense, Yamato implicitly negates Japan’s ideological alliance with the Axis while suggesting legitimacy in the past war itself” (Amano 2014: 6). However, the Yamato’s attack on an empire that stretches across planets (islands), uses powerful nuclear weaponry, and relies on fighters and aircraft carriers in battle creates the implication of an American foe. In this sense, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* reconciles militarism and pacifism, rewriting the war with Japan joining the fight against fascism and against militarism yet at the same time employing those same ideologies in the struggle for peace.

Amidst these two conflicting and confluent themes, the iconic profile of the IJN Yamato remains a prominent symbol in every episode. Susan Napier notes how this image fits with the series’ overall story,

Through its medium (animation) and genre (futuristic science fiction) the series defamiliarizes the war experience, allowing not only a working through of the trauma of defeat (through innumerable repetitions of attack and destruction) but ultimately a reworking of the defeat, both through the final success of the Yamato in every encounter and, even more importantly, through the fetishization of the

²⁰ In these cases, the Gamilas become a lens on the greater global phenomenon, as they involve Nazi/German motifs.

spaceship Yamato itself, not only a symbol of Japan's final battles in WWII but also a symbol of the Japanese nation. (Napier 2005: 3)

Every episode of the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* features the same opening sequence, the Yamato rising from the ravaged Earth as the ground cracks away below it, a literal resurrection image accompanied by rousing, patriotic music. Through long and lingering shots of the ship's iconic profile, the epic and stirring music which heralds it, and the visual repetition of the motifs of resurrection and rebirth, the Yamato becomes the symbol not only of might of humanity in the series, but also a clear visual reminder of Japan's war legacy. Early in the series this connection is spelled out in absolute terms, as the show flashes back to the IJN Yamato's final battle in the Pacific War. This is a striking scene which shows a Japanese father and son in 1945 as they watch the great ship leave Japan, its iconic profile fading into the mist. The IJN Yamato's dramatic final battle is shown in full, with skies filled with American planes and the battleship taking dozens of hits from bombs and torpedoes. The scene is played for awe and tragedy, as the American pilot who dealt the final blow salutes the fallen ship from his aircraft as it sinks, burning, to the bottom of the sea. With this scene, and the omnipresence of the Yamato image in the series, the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* makes its Pacific War-connection unforgettable, even though its construction of that experience is fiction.

Another contributing factor to the overall fictional grand narrative of the Pacific War is the role of the series' few female characters, Yuki Mori. Initially a nurse, she gains various additional responsibilities while aboard the Yamato. While the only major female character in the story she becomes a complex figure, shouldering the burden of womanhood almost exclusively. At varying points she acts as a mother figure, a healing presence, a lover, a daughter,

a target for ‘fan service,’²¹ and a maiden in distress; while these are by no means progressive roles for a female character in any media, Yuki’s complex role in the series makes her one of the franchise’s most fleshed-out characters. Regarding gender in the franchise, Hiromi Mizuno writes that elements of the show “help postwar Japan to reassert a masculinity that was brutally compromised after the defeat in World War II, the U.S. occupation, and the pacifist Showa constitution... This is not just postwar Japan’s fantasy: it is a male fantasy.” (Mizuno 2007: 110) In the male fantasy of *Space Battleship Yamato*, Yuki Mori becomes a female presence that foils the male characters. In many scenes with particularly masculine overtones, Yuki’s presence as a foil is one that heightens and emphasizes. Continuing Mizuno’s analysis, regarding the series’ final battle she notes that,

Instead of rejoicing over the victory, however, Yuki breaks into tears, murmuring, "What have we done? What have we done?" With apparent dismay and anger, Kodai also bitterly talks to himself, with tears flowing from his eyes: "In order to save Earth, we destroyed another planet. We should not have fought. We should have loved. Victory... tastes like ashes!" ... Despite Kodai’s lament, the battles and deaths that filled Yamato’s journey are justified at the end for the ultimate peace and love of family and humanity. The militarism of Yamato is coated with the message of peace and love. Kodai’s (and Yamato’s) masculinity is not compromised by his desire for peace and love. (Mizuno 2007: 111)

As Mizuno indicates, in this iconic scene Yuki kneels by Kodai, crying her own repentance for the devastation. However, her presence as in many other scenes foils Kodai’s, emphasizing his strength and masculinity, and driving home the conflation of masculinity, militarism, and peace.

²¹ A narrative trope in which the sexuality of a character (usually female) is emphasized via brief glimpses of that character’s body or underwear, as well as sexually-charged or seductive dialogue.

As a series featuring rousing, patriotic music as a Japanese battleship blasts apart enemies and essentially re-fights the Pacific War in space, it would be easy to imply that *Space Battleship Yamato* is a nationalist piece of media. However, to do so would imply the existence of a single Japanese ‘nationalism;’ however, the confluence of militarist and pacifist motifs in *Space Battleship Yamato* force a much more nuanced understanding of the series’ fictional grand narrative. Takekawa notes that nationalism is “a competition as well as a fusion of ideologies, thoughts, and sentiments, which individuals and groups of individuals attempt to promote in order to influence national identity construction... competition naturally occurs as they uphold different ideologies, thoughts, and sentiments for their nation-state” (Takekawa 2012: 3). This idea of nationalism(s) implies that there is no single vein of nationalism, no monolithic ideology that underpins the state. As such, *Space Battleship Yamato*’s embracing, critiquing, glorifying, and questioning of both militarism and pacifism supports an understanding of nationalisms in the plural, and supports a view of the complicated, multifaceted, but ultimately non-contradictory fictional grand narrative of the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*.

Mobile Suit Gundam, Introduction

Since its release in 1979, *Mobile Suit Gundam* has been a genre-defining staple of mecha anime (anime involving giant, piloted robots) and continues to be so to this day. Among even the most famous anime worldwide, *Gundam* stands out, and may be one of the most recognizable media franchises in the world. With dozens of televised series’ and countless spin-offs, manga, video games, and movies, the *Gundam* franchise has become a titan of the anime industry. Released in 1979 by director Yoshiyuki Tomino and the animation studio Sunrise, *Mobile Suit Gundam*’s initial 43-episode run had a similar fate to *Space Battleship Yamato*’s. It was initially

unsuccessful, and its cancellation close to its finale forced Yoshiyuki to truncate the plot from 52 episodes to 43. However, the plastic model line created by toy company Bandai and the subsequent release of theatrical re-runs launched the show to massive success. The plastic model line, known as “*gunpla*” (*Gundam* plastic models), is a significant part of the *Gundam* franchise today and accounts for a significant portion of the Japanese plastic model market.

The *Gundam* franchise releases one or two televised series every year, as well as numerous games, models, and spin-offs. While there are a number of conflicting canonical timelines and settings, every *Gundam* series contains a similar premise. In an unspecified near-future setting humanity has spread into the “Earth sphere” encompassing the Earth, the Moon, and local space. For various reasons, a child always comes into possession of a powerful fighting robot, known as a *Gundam*, and is forced or dragged into a war that involves both Earth and space.

The original *Gundam* series represented a departure from the traditional “super robot” mecha²² genre. Super robot anime can be characterized as series’ which involve giant fighting robots of colossal scale, powered by magic or otherwise non-scientific means, and armed with fantastical weaponry. *Mobile Suit Gundam*, however, was an early example of the “real robot” genre, in which mecha are functional military constructs, piloted by soldiers and armed with realistic, comprehensible weaponry. *Mobile Suit Gundam* set a precedent for “real robot” animation, involving military mecha, a dark, war-torn future, and an emphasis on the characters who piloted the machines over the machines themselves.

These aspects built *Mobile Suit Gundam* into a realistic, military, character driven drama in the context of a war involving mecha. From 1979 onward, the *Gundam* franchise has likely

²² A word used to describe any science-fiction robotic war machine, but most commonly, the bipedal variety found in the *Gundam* franchise and similar media.

become one of the most widely-known examples of the mecha and “real robot” genre, and continues to have massive popularity well into the postmodern period.

Significantly, the plot of *Mobile Suit Gundam* takes place within the context of a colossal war. Every episode of the anime begins with an identical somber opening, explaining how humans expanded into space but remain faced by the horror of war. This opening contains the iconic line, “giant space cities orbiting the Earth became a second home for humanity, where people were born, raised, and die.”²³ As the narrator finishes the word “die,” an image of a laser weapon scorching a human city fills the screen, and the opening plunges into visions of war. *Mobile Suit Gundam* is the story of this “One-Year War” between the government of Earth, the “Earth Federation,” and a rebellious and despotic human colony known as the “Principality of Zeon.”

In short, the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* begins with a boy named Amuro Ray, living on a space colony in the “Earth sphere” of the Earth Federation. A sudden attack by the Principality of Zeon leads Amuro to boarding the Gundam, an experimental military robot he happens to find while evacuating. Amuro and the other evacuees, mostly children, slowly make their way to Earth onboard a warship known as White Base, while engaging Zeon forces at many points on their long odyssey. Amuro pilots the Gundam in these engagements, becoming a proficient pilot as he battles his rival Char Aznable. After the war turns against Zeon during the Battle of Jaburo, Amuro sets off with the rest of the Federation military to attack the Zeon fortress of Ao Baoa Qu, a pyrrhic Federation victory that sees most of both the Federation and Zeon forces destroyed, including the Gundam. Amuro survives the battle, but the show ends with the war still locked in a stalemate that may yet continue for many years.

²³ From *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), episode 1.

The fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* is strikingly different from that of *Space Battleship Yamato*, yet fulfills a similar role. As a “real robot” anime, *Mobile Suit Gundam* contains a large number of elements that produce a gritty, military-political universe: the setting for the action in the series. The timeline of this universe is known as the “Universal Century” (*Uchū seiki*), and can be seen and increasingly understood by viewing more and more of the episodes of *Mobile Suit Gundam*- through mass consumption, viewers gain glimpse-by-glimpse knowledge of one of the vast worlds of the *Gundam* franchise. The *Gundam* franchise maintains a number of competing, conflicting timelines, but among these the Universal Century stands as the oldest and most detailed. As such, the world and worldview of the Universal Century becomes the fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*. This is not to say that the timeline itself is the fictional grand narrative; rather, the entire universe becomes the fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*, for which the Universal Century is its chronology. This is not rooted in any real-world grand narrative or Japanese cultural invocation, but rather is a purely artificial construct, built to sate fan desire for grand narratives in an era of where those were rapidly decaying. Fleshing out this fiction is a wealth of robot designs, mechanical data, military-political information, and a diverse host of characters who populate the world of the Universal Century. For the sake of comprehension, this thesis will refer to this fictional grand narrative as the ‘world of the Universal Century.’

Mobile Suit Gundam, Argument

Unlike *Space Battleship Yamato*, the fictional grand narrative that underpins the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* is not one based in reality; while it contains visual allusion to World War

Two and the then-ongoing Cold War, as a fiction it is strictly neither. Rather, the fictional grand narrative of *Mobile Suit Gundam* is just that- in other words, a big story. Azuma himself writes,

Take Gundam, for example: since its first television series was broadcast in 1979, works that continued the series... were conceived of as belonging the same fictitious history. Accordingly, the desires of Gundam fans necessarily and faithfully embarked on a close examination of this fanciful history; in reality Gundam-related books were already shrouded in timelines and mechanical data... at this point a narrative other than reality is constructed. And the fictional narrative occasionally fulfills the grand role of substituting for the real grand narrative. (Azuma 2009: 34)

In other words, *Mobile Suit Gundam* has created its own grand narrative. The series' (and franchise's) enormous catalogue of different mobile suits has given birth to an infinity of mechanical statistics, variations, armaments, and models; in addition the gross number of political factions, settings, and characters far exceeds those of most anime. This is truly grand narrative as fiction- a fully-fictional grand narrative created, as Azuma put it, as that of the generation "driven to forge the grand narrative that had been lost" (Azuma 2009: 35). However, in true "Era of Fictions" fashion, this artificial, fictional grand narrative is shifted to the background behind a screen of small narratives- forty-three²⁴ or them, to be exact. The fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* is the world of the Universal Century, and is famous among *Gundam* fans and otaku as a science-fiction universe of particular depth and complexity. The sheer size of the *Gundam* franchise itself means that the franchise contains a number of fictional grand narratives (as there are a number of universes or timelines), however, the singular series *Mobile Suit Gundam* contains only one.

²⁴ The number of episodes in the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*.

The largest contributing factor to the world of the Universal Century's complexity is its status within a genre known as "real robot." "Real robot" series are characterized by their realism, military and geo-political themes, depiction of mecha as physical weapons that use ammunition and realistic technology, and a focus on character pilots. As *Mobile Suit Gundam* is "real robot" anime, the true focus of the series is the characters, especially the pilots Amuro Ray and his erstwhile rival Char Aznable. The Gundam itself, and the various mobile suits piloted by Char, form a significant and meaningful element of the series; however, they are ultimately secondary to the characters who pilot them. In his review of the novel adaptations of the original 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*, Patrick Drazen notes that the series "is not post-apocalyptic, since it takes place during the [one-year] war... Nor are any of these Gundam novels- indeed, nor are any of the Gundam stories- about giant robots. Instead, Tomino focused on the people who waged war in the robots. In doing so, he changed science fiction anime" (Drazen 2006: 177). Ultimately, this is proven through the series' final, symbolic discarding of the Gundam- in the final battle of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*, the titular mobile suit (while on autopilot) stops a fatal laser beam from killing Amuro and is reduced to slag before his eyes. This final fight destroys Char's mobile suit as well, enabling Amuro to resume battling his rival. Amuro's ability to stand fight; and ultimately, choose not to fight, is a result of his liberation from his Gundam mobile suit; which is in turn a product of the series' focus on characters over the mecha themselves.

However, as the previous quote from Azuma attests, the focus of the world of the Universal Century on machines and mechanical data is a critical part of its role as a fictional grand narrative. *Mobile Suit Gundam* features not only a large variety of mobile suits, but grounds each one in mechanical reality. When mobile suits are repaired or damage their mechanical internals are shown in detail, along with descriptions of their operation, maintenance,

and armaments. The 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* emphasizes the real and mechanical nature of its war machines, which has led to a vast amount of mechanical data published within the franchise's core canon and within associated novels, guidebooks, and other information. This mechanical data provides the world of the Universal Century- an ultimately artificial science fiction setting- with the depth and reality for fans to consider it a true (yet fictional) grand narrative. As Azuma states, *Gundam* was "already shrouded in timelines and mechanical data... at this point a narrative other than reality is constructed. And the fictional narrative occasionally fulfills the grand role of substituting for the real grand narrative" (Azuma 2009: 34).

The fictional histories of the Universal Century's timeline also play into its categorization as fictional grand narrative. The series and setting are built upon a fictional historical incident known as the "colony drop." During the opening engagements of the One-Year War, the Principality of Zeon dropped a colony- a massive cylindrical space station- to Earth, levelling an entire city and killing millions of people. This atrocity, illustrated with lurid nuclear imagery in the anime, becomes one of the focal points of the conflict. While both sides in the war have access to this technology, the colossal loss of life which could result from their use, as well as the moral implications of using a populated civilian installation as a weapon, prevent them from being used during the series' forty-three episode arc. With this in mind, the 'colony drop' is an indisputably nuclear image, often characterized in the series with blinding light and countless civilian casualties. Considering this theme of nuclear annihilation,²⁵ *Mobile Suit Gundam* can be seen in many ways as a cold war narrative. This is because the One-Year War, which comprises the majority of the plot of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, is expressly a post-nuclear conflict. Just as the Cold War was a conflict that followed the deployment of nuclear weapons, so the One-Year War follows much the same pattern. The complete annihilation following the 'colony drop' mimics

²⁵ However, the despotism of Zeon and the fleet battles in space also recall some elements of the Second World War.

the devastation of Hiroshima, as a civilian city is engulfed in light, albeit though the target of Zeon's weapon is Australia, not Japan. Fundamentally, the war in *Mobile Suit Gundam* is a conflict that led to the deployment of a weapon of mass destruction, and the remaining stalemate (cold war) is a war fought in the shadow of such a weapon. As such the One-Year War becomes a microcosm of the World War Two/Cold War era. Within this context the Gundam represents a post-nuclear weapon; it is a tactical weapon providing immense battlefield advantage but is ultimately not a weapon of mass destruction. Through the small narratives of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, the series reproduces real nuclear anxieties within its fictional grand narrative.

Mobile Suit Gundam can also be considered a coming-of-age story. However, this coming-of-age is not simply that of the protagonist, but is writ large to refer to that of humanity as well. The story of the Universal Century is not only a science-fiction narrative of conflict and struggle, but one of human evolution. As the war pushes them to the limits of their human ability, some characters such as Amuro (and later, his rival Char Aznable) begin to develop psychic abilities, and battles increasingly become dominated by these 'newtypes.' Amuro's development as a newtype parallels the coming-of-age theme of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which directly relates the series' final battles to Amuro's coming-of-age as an adult.

With the coming-of-age metaphor of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, themes of sexuality are meaningfully present. Contrasting heavily with contemporary/postmodern anime, the White Base is a ship crewed by a number of underage girls, yet fan service surrounding these female characters is essentially absent. However, one particular episode stands out- a supply ship arrives at the White Base with much-needed repair parts and upgrades, and with it the supply officer Lieutenant Matilda Ajan. Lieutenant Matilda, as the crew calls her, is a mature woman, one of the few adult female characters in the series. Matilda's beauty becomes an object of fascination

for Amuro and many other young male crewmembers. In the various scenes where her plane arrives to resupply the White Base, Amuro takes every opportunity he can to follow her and marvel in her beauty. In reality, Matilda is simply the only mature woman Amuro and the other come into contact with during their months of travel through space; but to Amuro Matilda is almost deified; when he looks at her, her background becomes a wash of golden light. While Matilda herself never becomes the target of any fan service scenes, she is one of the series' most sexualized characters- and, one of the series' only mature women. By contrast, the dozen or so younger girls aboard the White Base are not sexualized even close to this extent.

Another integral component of the coming-of-age aspect of *Mobile Suit Gundam* is Amuro's relationship with his father. Since long before *Mobile Suit Gundam*, father figures have been significant players in "real robot" and mecha anime (Lunning 2008: 281), and the same is certainly true in the *Gundam* franchise. Interviewed by scholar Frenchy Lunning, Crispin Freeman notes that,

Traditionally, in anime, a giant robot is constructed by a scientist whose son (or grandson) eventually pilots it. The father often dies or becomes inconsequential to the story, leaving his son to figure out the logic and meaning of his creation. This is usually a necessary step in any coming-of-age story: the authority figure must recede in order for the young hero to become the authority for his own life...

Piloting a giant robot satisfies the requirements of an archtypal father-atonement journey: one in which the son can resolve his relationship with his father and can move forward into adulthood with a new identity and purpose. (Lunning 2008: 281)

Mobile Suit Gundam further develops this archetype, further identifying the Gundam itself with adolescence and Amuro's burgeoning newtype abilities with adulthood. Amuro can resolve his relationship with his father through learning to pilot the Gundam, but his powers as a newtype are product of the war, not his family. It is only with the destruction of his father's legacy that Amuro is symbolically liberated from his father's creation. This motif of a series' core mobile suit as developed by the protagonist's father, and its symbolic destruction marking a crucial turning point in the plot, has become a mainstay in the *Gundam* franchise ever since.

The thematic arcs of human evolution and fatherhood reach their climactic conclusion with the final battle of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* series. The war does not end at Zeon; rather, the Zeon forces stop the Federation at the fortress of A Baoa Qu, and the war lapses into another stalemate before they can attack the Principality of Zeon itself. The "Battle of A Baoa Qu" becomes the final battle of the *Mobile Suit Gundam* series, with both the Federation and Zeon forces committing nearly their entire militaries into the protracted fighting. Amuro's newtype abilities have developed completely, and his psychic powers allow him near-perfect control of the Gundam and superhuman combat capabilities. His rival, Char, is present at the battle as well, piloting his own newtype-empowered Zeong²⁶ mobile suit. The final battle between Amuro and Char results in the destruction of each's mobile suit, and they continue to fight with sidearms and swords as the fortress burns around them. This scene represents Amuro's final liberation from the Gundam, and for the first time in the series he fights with his own body and his own strength—through the destruction of the mobile suit, Amuro's last connection to his father is thrown away and he finally becomes the newtype- and the adult- he was meant to be. The great motif of the 'coming-of-age of humanity' through its microcosm of Amuro Ray endows the 1979 *Mobile Suit*

²⁶ Not to be confused with Zeon.

Gundam with a lofty subtext of a universe undergoing epic change amidst a realistic geopolitical struggle.

CHAPTER 3: THE “ERA OF ANIMALS”

The Age of Affective Elements

Where fictionalized grand narratives provided the motivation for consumption in the “Era of Fictions,” the “Era of Animals” is dominated by the affective element. In the media of the “Era of Animals,” such as the 2013 *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* and the 2015 *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, affective elements provided the enjoyment and satisfaction consumers seek in media. Azuma argues that the small narratives of the “Era of Animals”- the episodes and installments of media- allow viewers not a glimpse of a grand narrative, but rather a grand database of affective elements and tropes common across all vast sectors of media. Considering the contemporary moment a decade beyond Azuma’s scholarship, narratives- once the core of storytelling in the “Era of Ideals” and the “Era of Fictions”- have all but disappeared, replaced by the database of affective elements that form the motivation of “Age of Animals” consumption. This thesis seeks to show that the components of those grand narratives may yet linger on, reduced and repackaged as affective elements equal to the rest of those which invaded small narratives throughout the “Era of Animals.”

***Space Battleship Yamato 2199*, Introduction**

By the 21st century, the *Space Battleship Yamato* franchise was retaining some of its popularity, but with over thirty years having passed since the release of the original televised series, much had changed. Significantly, copyright disputes between the director Leiji Matsumoto and the producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki left the series fractured, and with Matsumoto holding on to character design concepts while Nishizaki produced new franchise content using

differently-designed characters.²⁷ With Nishizaki's death in late 2010 the franchise again normalized under a unified copyright, but Matsumoto had already retired from franchise production. In 2013, the first episodes of the new franchise remake, *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*, began airing in cinemas throughout Japan. This new remake was produced and directed by an entirely new staff, brought on new voice actors, and updated the animation style to use state-of-the-art graphics and CGI animation. However, billed as a true remake, the ship and mechanical designs, characters, and (ostensibly) the plot remain faithful to the original. It was first released theatrically in seven installments, beginning in April 2013, and received its first televised airings from that point onward as well.

The core premise of the 2013 *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* is functionally identical to its 1974 predecessor. Due to seemingly-unstoppable alien attack, the historic battleship IJN Yamato is refitted as a powerful space-faring warship and must reach the planet Iscandar in order to save humanity. For a remake released so long after its original *Space Battleship Yamato* is remarkably similar and for the first half of the series the overarching plot is almost identical to that of the 1974 first series. Even by the end, the concrete events (reaching Iscandar, battling the Gamilas leader Deslar on his homeworld) remain the same, even if the results are strikingly different.

While it is too early to assess the impact of a show released in 2013, it is clear that *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* has met with significant popularity. Finding a market with fans of the original as well as younger generations, the series has spawned model and merchandise lines far greater than those of the 1974 version and has already produced two feature-length films, with rumors of a sequel series already in production (Anime News Network 2015).

²⁷ *Space Battleship Yamato: Resurrection (Uchū senkan Yamato: Fukkatsu hen, 2009).*

While the skeleton of its plot is nearly identical, many of the core events of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* differ from its 1974 original. Radioactive attack by the Gamilas Empire leaves the Earth in ruins, and in a final hope to save humanity the IJN Yamato is refitted as a powerful starship. Her mission is to reach Iscandar, and receive a powerful radiation-cleaning device that will render the Earth habitable again. The Yamato leaves Earth, destroying Gamilas bases wherever it can and narrowly avoiding mutiny by its crew. During this time the Gamilas Empire is wracked by political disunion, and an assassination attempt on Deslar leaves the Gamilas military headless, allowing the Yamato to slip through to Iscandar. After discovering the Gamilas homeworld's proximity to Iscandar, the Yamato engages in a final battle with Deslar's forces, ultimately defeating the despot and freeing the Gamilas people from his rule. With the Gamilas Empire now an ally of humanity, the Yamato is able to retrieve safely the radiation-cleaning device and return to heal the Earth.

Produced deep within the "Era of Animals," the 2013 *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* is filled with affective elements, of which one is its old fictional grand narrative. A large number of affective characters fill the cast, complete with trope-heavy character designs and transparent references to other anime. In addition, the show becomes host to a number of new story arcs and filler episodes, including a 'beach episode:' an extremely common hallmark of "Era of Animals" storytelling in which characters take a break from the ordinary story to wear swimsuits and relax on a sunlit beach. Characters behave less like battle-hardened crew, and more like television characters, each filling their own trope and sating otaku/audience desire for certain character archetypes. The presence of these affective elements, and many others, ultimately crowds out the fictional grand narrative of the 1974 original, changing it drastically. The nuanced interrogation of nationalism, the distinct trends of militarism, and the desire for peace are significantly reduced

in the 2013 remake. With the lack of the cataclysmic results of the final battle and the general invincibility of 2013's Yamato, the remake feels very distant from the rawness and heaviness of defeat, simply displaying the images of the 1974 original's Pacific War (fictional) grand narrative without it meaningfully underpinning the narrative.

Space Battleship Yamato 2199, Argument

Compared to the 1974 original, while the skeleton of the plot remains intact, the execution and thematic character of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* is radically different. Namely, the series plays host to a number of invading affective elements highly characteristic of Hiroki Azuma's "Era of Animals."

Most notably is the show's updated cast. While the original Yamato carried only one named female character to Iscandar, Yuki Mori, the 2013 Yamato carries four more (five counting the Gamilas character Melda Ditz). These new "Yamato Girls" (as they are termed in figures and merchandise) represent a wide array of databasified female characters in anime. Yuria Misaki is the sprightly twin-tailed radio operator, who appears far younger than she is and fills the *loli*²⁸ niche in the series' cast. Kaoru Niimi is the shapely, seductive science officer, an older woman who uses her sexuality for her own ends aboard the Yamato. Makoto Harada is the ship's bumbling nurse, complete with *ahoge* (a common affective element where hair stands up on the head, indicating innocence or clumsiness) and oversized breasts. Finally Akira "Rei" Yamamoto is an ace fighter pilot whose appearance is so strikingly similar to Neon Genesis Evangelion's famous Rei Ayanami that she shares a nickname (though *Space Battleship Yamato* cites other reasons). In short, these new female characters fragment Yuki Mori's role and responsibilities from the 1974 original. Yuki as warrior becomes Rei, Yuki as innocent becomes

²⁸ A widely-used term in otaku subcultures referring to a sexualized young girl.

Misaki, Yuki as healer becomes Makoto, and a part of Yuki as feminine temptation becomes Kaoru. In fact, Yuki's role is so fragmented that she herself becomes an amnesiac in the 2013 series, with little memory before the point when she boarded the Yamato. While the increase in female characters is a step forward for the franchise, their roles in the series are simplified to the point of superficiality. This is a hallmark of Azuma's "Era of Animals," the breakdown of complex entities into superficial database elements; instead of a single character whose presence enables understanding of a masculine and nationalist fictional grand narrative, a large number of fragmentary characters satisfy the desires of contemporary anime fans for sexualized women and fan service in the show.

Even the critical scene with the Gamilas pilot in the 1974 version becomes hijacked by this trend, resulting in a new fan service character in the form of Melda Ditz instead of the meaningful interrogation of World War Two as a racially-driven conflict. In battle, the Yamato takes aboard a downed Gamilas pilot, much the same as in the 1974 series. However, while this character is humanoid (and represents the crew's first look at a real Gamilas), no dramatic struggle or brutal knife-fight occur- rather, the pilot is female and attractive by human standards, and a sexually-charged interrogation ensues in which members of the Yamato's crew take guesses to see if Kodai might be seduced by their alien visitor. Ultimately the series remains family-friendly, but the Yamato makes a new ally in the pilot, Melda Ditz, who returns as a recurring character. Melda's arc also adds to the series a rebellion storyline, as the crew of the Yamato become aware of rebellious factions within the Gamilas Empire.

Politics in the Gamilas Empire have been revamped utterly, and the viewer is given a much greater sense of the political atmosphere in many regions of the empire. The empire of the remake is a sprawling collection of planets, with multiple races and ethnicities in a multi-tiered

hierarchy with true blue-skinned Gamilas at the top. Political intrigue, executions, and urban unrest abound, and the viewer begins to have sympathy for many aspects of life in the empire. While the despot Deslar (now given the even more Hitler-esque name “Abelt Deslar”) remains cunning and evil, many members of the Gamilas high command are shown to be more humane individuals but forced to evil through Deslar’s intimidation. This increasingly-complex empire bears little resemblance to the political entity of the 1974 original, and while the images (database elements) seem similar, such as the Nazi allusions in Gamilas iconography and anthem, the lively and hierarchical empire bears little connection to the fictional World War Two grand narrative of the 1974 original.

Regarding the databasification of characters as mentioned above, in postmodern anime fashion *Space Battleship Yamato* hosts a number of character-driven and filler episodes. Early in the show, two filler episodes (one involving a robotic attack on the Yamato, the other involving psychic aliens in the employ of Deslar) distract the both the Yamato (and the plot) from its mission, removing significant sections of the original narrative in order to seemingly flesh out the world of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*. Most striking is the significant shortening of the final battle on Gamilas to allow for a beach episode on Iscandar. The crew of the Yamato don bathing suits (military-issue for the men, two-piece swimsuits for the women) and frolic in the pristine waters of Iscandar before completing their mission, using the Yamato’s fighter catapults for diving boards and sunbathing on its decks. This may be the ultimate perversion of the Yamato image, co-opting its storied history to become a glorified pool party for contemporary database consumption.

Considering the image of the IJN Yamato itself, this too shifts from Pacific War-motif to database element. Instead of being used as a symbol through which the fictional grand narrative

of the Pacific War can be understood, 2013's Yamato becomes an invincible science-fiction icon rather than a relic of Japan's wartime past. The scenes found in the 1974 version detailing its history disappear, its iconic profile is relegated to backdrop at many points in the series, and its crew are not soldiers but rather characters, engaged in their own gossip, drama, and internal machinations. In fact, this Yamato-as-element trend comes to a head when Kaoru Niimi and other members of the crew lead a full-scale mutiny, fracturing the crew in ways unimaginable compared to the battle-hardened comrades of the original. While the Yamato frequently does battle with enemy ships and bases, scenes of the Yamato's repair, which are common in the 1974 original, become much rarer by the 2013 version. When the Yamato concludes a battle it is rarely ever damaged, and when a hull plate is knocked loose these rare repair scenes become excuses for flirting and gossip among the crew. In one battle in the 1974 version the Yamato loses nearly its entire lower half and is crippled almost beyond repair; the same battle scene in *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* only results in the ship suffering a few major burns but is ultimately unscathed. In the 2013 edition, the Yamato is simply invincible: an ironclad icon rather than a resurrected battleship. This divorces the Yamato from its reality as a Pacific War warship; with its inability to take damage or be wounded in battle, the Yamato as an icon feels much more distant from the rawness and heaviness of defeat so palpable in the original. In the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*, every hit the ship took and every hole punched through its hull seemed a harbinger of doom, a chilling reminder of the ship's historic fate. With those sequences absent, the Yamato of 2013 seems as far removed from its historic predecessor as it does from the red Earth.

Additionally, the remake divests itself of many World War Two²⁹ images and motifs, distancing itself from the narrative of the Pacific War. Fighter spacecraft no longer make propeller sounds, and the World War Two flashbacks are completely absent in *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*. The Gamilas become less American and more Nazi, removing some of the nuance of their previous multifaceted existence. With suicide tactics such as the opening sacrifice of Mamoru Kodai absent from the remake (this time justified by military necessity), the 2013 version seats toxic Japanese nationalism solely with the Gamilas enemy. By deleting the interrogation of nationalism(s) and the American enemy from the series, *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* relegates Nazi regalia and Japanese nationalism to mere database elements, existing superficially but revealing little in the background.

Possibly the most striking change comes with the 2013 remake's handling of the final battle on the Gamilas homeworld. Before the Yamato arrives at Iscandar, it must first fight a climactic battle on the enemy homeworld. However, the events of this final battle are significantly, meaningfully different. Working with members of the Gamilas resistance, the Yamato engages in a surgical strike, descending to the Gamilas capital and precisely destroying Deslar's fortress (now imagined as a heavily armed floating station) instead of obliterating the planet itself. Before the Yamatos's main cannon erases Deslar's fortress, the despot attempts to drop the massive station onto the Gamilas capital city in order to destroy the Yamato; thus the threat to Gamilas comes not from the Yamato but from Deslar himself. The Yamato's actions do not destroy the Gamilas homeworld, but save it from the corrupting influence of Deslar. Without the destruction of Gamilas civilization, the moving scene at the end of the original vanishes completely in the remake- there is no mourning for the dead, no bitter realization of the cost of

²⁹ The term "World War Two" will be used here as opposed to "Pacific War," as aspects such as fighter aircraft and Nazi regalia are common to the global phenomenon of the conflict, not the Pacific War alone.

victory. Instead of an understanding of the rawness of defeat and the annihilation of a people, the show's final battle ends with the elation of victory and the pride and admiration of the Gamillas civilians the Yamato has saved.

These affective elements, as well as numerous others, relegate the Pacific War fictional grand narrative of the original *Space Battleship Yamato* to the level of just another database element. As fans in the "Age of Animals" demand female characters, fan service, nostalgia and so on, the fictional Pacific War grand narrative diminishes in importance. These themes largely replaced those of nationalism, masculinity, colonialism, and war imagery, replacing the old fictional grand narrative of the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato*. Without these themes in the *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*, this fictional grand narrative fades away. While the slight retention of the images of the old fictional grand narrative allow the remade series to access the emotional resonance and nostalgia associated with those aspects and images, the superficial imagery of the old series remains simply a repackaged relic only barely reminiscent of its "Era of Fictions" past.

Gundam: Reconquista in G, Introduction

From its origin in 1979, the *Gundam* franchise has been constantly updated and reimagined. For the first fifteen years of its existence, *Gundam* media remained canon to the original 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* original. However in 1995, the comedy spin-off *Mobile Fighter G Gundam* (*Kidō butōden G Gandamu*, 1995) became the first non-canonical televised series released in the *Gundam* franchise, and between 1994 (the last Universal Century-canon

television series³⁰) and 2014 there were very few *Gundam* series' aired in canon with the original *Mobile Suit Gundam*. In fact, the only Universal Century-canon series' produced during this time were not released as serialized television shows. The year 2014 saw the return of original 1979 director Yoshiyuki Tomino to the Sunrise animation studio, and the production of *Gundam: Reconguista in G*- the first Universal Century-canon *Gundam* anime in twenty years. Its name recalling a “reconquest” of the original canon timeline, the series was released as a 26-episode series from late 2014 to early 2015, taking in place in the “Regild Century” (*Rigirudo senchurī*) following the wars of the previous Universal Century timeline.

With this in mind, *Gundam: Reconguista in G* is not a remake, and is essentially more of a long-delayed sequel than it is a reimagining of the core story of the original 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*. However its common setting and director, as well as its long-awaited status as a return to the original canon and its position as a sequel to the original series, mark it as a unique and valuable object for this kind of analysis. In addition, most *Gundam* franchise content released since 1995 have followed extremely similar narrative models, and as such *Gundam: Reconguista in G* represents the closest the franchise has come to returning to the world of the Universal Century with a serial television anime.

While positioned in the future of the Universal Century timeline, *Gundam: Reconguista in G* follows an extremely similar premise to most *Gundam* franchise content. A young boy named grows up in a military installation, and due to enemy attack is forced to pilot an experimental mobile suit. He travels throughout the Earth Sphere and beyond, trying to unlock the secrets of his mobile suit and end a conflict that threatens all life in the Earth Sphere itself.

³⁰ A large number of Gundam franchise spin-offs were released, both as movies and as serialized television anime, between 1995 and 2013. However, these were not canon to the original Universal Century timeline. One canon story titled *Unicorn Gundam* was released, however, this was not serialized on television until 2016.

The progression of this plot is similar to that of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* in the abstract, but the details are radically different, as the next section will entail.

Having its initial airing conclude not even a year before the completion of this thesis, the impact of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* is currently difficult to assess. However, it is increasingly clear that the series has had mixed reviews from longtime fans and younger enthusiasts alike. While the parent company Bandai has created a number of model sets and merchandise lines for the series, the show ultimately seems to have generated little interest, with no sequels or expansions planned in the near future. In fact Bandai's next project, titled "Iron-Blooded Orphans" (*Tekketsu no orufenzu*, 2015) represents a complete shift in style, tone, and content away from that of the 2014 *Gundam: Reconguista in G*.

Gundam: Reconguista in G tells the story of Bellri Zenam, a young boy raised in the capital of Earth many centuries after the wars of the Universal Century. War has become taboo in this new society, and all machines on Earth are powered by mysterious 'photon batteries' from a source known only as 'Towasanga' and worshipped with religious fervor. When conflict threatens to break out on a world that no longer remembers war, Bellri accidentally comes to pilot an experimental mobile suit called the G-Self and joins a group of space pirates seeking to unravel the mysteries of the Earth Sphere. Battling a number of loosely-connected enemy factions in space, Bellri's comrades travel beyond the Moon in their quest to learn the truth. They discover the source of the photon batteries and uncover a plot to bring back the bloodshed of the Universal Century, but become embroiled in the very war they sought to prevent. As the new war rises to its climax, Bellri calls upon the goodwill and humanity of the soldiers to stop fighting, and the conflict ends as abruptly as it began. With the horror of war realized by all sides, the world does not slide back to the conflicts of the Universal Century and peace is realized again in

the Earth Sphere.

Released in late 2014, *Gundam: Reconguista in G* is a product of the “Era of Animals;” a series filled with and defined by affective elements, one of which is the image of the old Universal Century from the 1979 original. The characters are no longer the realistic soldiers of a ‘real robot’ franchise, but represent a wide variety of tropes and archetypal characters. In addition, the numbers of different factions and characters are enormous, obscuring depth and detail under sheer numbers. The show plays to otaku sensibilities by setting up a number of likely relationship possibilities, allowing fans to fantasize romantic arcs not in the series’ actual canon. As the next section will detail, many characters and factions seem one-dimensional, present not to build a universe such as the world of the Universal Century, but to sate fan desire for certain character and media archetypes. Many of the characters, factions, settings, and plot devices clearly contain the affective elements that are the core of Azuma’s “Era of Animals,” and a clear endorsement of the accuracy of his observations; these affective elements occupy the space where the original fictional grand narrative once was. It is clear that the impetus for watching *Gundam: Reconguista in G* is not a great story, but rather the affective elements in the characters and settings in the series.

However, images and elements of the Universal Century timeline are still present. Mecha models from the 1979 original appear as rusted hulks dotting the battlefields of Earth, and the climax of the 2014 installment even takes place in Jaburo, the great fortress of the Earth Federation during the Universal Century timeline. Alongside the ominous references to the conflicts and wars of the Universal Century, which the characters of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* work to prevent, these elements create a shadow of the old fictional grand narrative in the postmodern age. However, this shadow lacks the fundamental power of the original and no

longer underpins the narrative itself. With its superficial tropes and images repackaged as affective elements, the old fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* is visible yet little more significant than any other affective element in the new 2014 series. This allows the series to access the emotional resonance, nostalgia, and meaning associated with those aspects and images, without undergirding the narrative as an actual fictional grand narrative would.

Gundam: Reconguista in G, Argument

Gundam: Reconguista in G is significant for its return to the Universal Century canon, however it also represents a departure from both the *Gundam* franchise's narrative coherency and the quality it has long been famous for. Compared to the 1979 original, many core themes of the franchise seem conspicuously absent. The story of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* following the story of a young boy who comes to pilot a mobile suit, joins the crew of a spacefaring vessel, and travels through space fighting enemy mobile suits and learning the secrets of his own; in this sense it is very similar to the 1979 original. However, below the surface it represents a massive franchise shift away from the original themes and fictional grand narrative of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*. One of the primary sources of the original's fictional grand narrative was its clear 'real robot' genre, which focused on realistic and feasible mecha, the military/political environment within which they fought, and most importantly on the characters who piloted them. *Gundam: Reconguista in G* removes the earlier fictional grand narrative by removing the themes most correlated to it.

To begin with, it is somewhat difficult to characterize the mobile suits of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* as 'real robot(s)'. Focusing on the protagonist's mobile suit, the G-Self is a not

piloted by conventional means, but rather selects its pilot (in this case, Bellri Zenam). This produces a seemingly magical link between pilot and mobile suit highly uncharacteristic of the “real robot” quality of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*. Bellri’s significant piloting abilities are not due to education or training, but rather due to this natural link that seems to exist between man and machine. While the connection is explained later in the show- the scientists of the Rayhunton family built their most powerful creation such that only a Rayhunton could pilot it- it removes the original character development of the protagonist struggling to learn the intricacies of his mechanical partner, as seen in the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*. Many of the 1979 series’ most harrowing earlier moments came from Amuro Ray hurriedly flipping through the Gundam’s operation manual while a powerful enemy closed in. In addition, the G-Self seems to use neither energy nor ammunition in order to fight and is armed with a variety of mysterious weapons of near-fantastical power, further contributing to the image that the G-Self is actually a ‘super robot’ of mystical or magical power. By moving the series’ primary depiction of realistic mecha more toward a construction of the ‘super robot’ genre, *Gundam: Reconquista in G* moves away from the realistic and mechanical motif that characterized the 1979 series’ fictional grand narrative. Bellri’s mobile suit, the legendary G-Self, surpasses every mobile suit in the series by a considerable amount, even though its abilities are never explained nor Bellri ever meaningfully trained in its operation. With the main character so extraordinarily powerful without explanation, and his mecha so magically endowed with combat ability, the old fictional grand narrative of the world of the Universal Century suffers in two areas. The mechanical detail that endowed the fictional grand narrative with grim realism is significantly diminished, and the protagonist’s struggle with learning to operate the mobile suit is barely present at all.

This link between pilot and mobile suit changes a core aspect of the series' theme of fatherhood. Bellri's relationship with his father (a motif which is arguably the thematic core of many *Gundam* franchise series') is handled much differently in *Gundam: Reconquista in G* than in other franchise media. Primarily, Bellri is clearly an adopted child (by a single mother) in the series, as his father had died at an undisclosed point in the past. As such Bellri's father, unlike Amuro's in *Mobile Suit Gundam*, never appears to guide or hinder Bellri on his quest; as a figure he is ultimately meaningless in the early part of the series. However as Bellri learns that his parents were in fact the Rayhunts, the royal family of Towasanga (the moon colony and source of the Earth's critical "photon batteries"), this explains why he is able to pilot the G-Self and few others are able to. As the "Rayhunton Code" of the G-Self limits only descendants of the Rayhunton family to pilot it, Bellri's father (though deceased) has given Bellri a powerful gift and enabled him to become the core hero of the series' primary conflict. As such, Bellri's father becomes an abstract, positive, enabling force, rather than a limitation that the protagonist (like Amuro of 1979) must struggle to overcome.

Gundam: Reconquista in G additionally suffers from an overabundance of warring factions which weakens the military-political backdrop critical to the grand narrative of a "real robot" series. From the warring factions of Earth, the religious military of the Capital, the spacefaring Dorett Fleet, and many others, over ten different factions vie for power in the series' twenty-six episode span. Due to the large number of factions, each link in this complex political web receives little focus in the overall narrative of the 2014 series. As the crew of the Megafauna move from adversary to adversary, fighting first on Earth, then the moon, then deep space, each faction they face undergoes only very little development. The antagonism between the different factions is often left unexplained, or attributed to simplistic causes ill-suited to rationalizing the

scale of the conflict which develops in the series. The military-political backdrop so critical to the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* feels considerably underdeveloped in *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, and ultimately many of the series' factions fails to matter in the series' overall story. In addition to this overabundance of factions, a general lack of ideology and loyalty is a strong trend in *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, with few characters showing loyalty to their own factions and most viewing the various wars of the series as more of amusing adventures rather than actual conflicts. Very few characters die in *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, which contributes to this atmosphere.

The original *Mobile Suit Gundam* focused on the characters who piloted the mecha over the mecha themselves. This is one of the core characteristics of “real robot” anime; that while a series may appear to be fully within the mecha genre, the anime ultimately tells the story of characters who live and learn alongside their robotic counterparts, ultimately surpassing the need for the mecha and learning to live on their own. In the broader *Gundam* franchise (beyond just the Universal Century), this focus on characters is usually expressed via two distinct motifs: human evolution (the “newtypes” of Universal Century canon) and the main character’s relationship with their father. However, in *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, the character development focus of the newtype motif is nearly nonexistent. In other *Gundam* media the rigors of life and war in space lead some humans to evolve the psychic abilities which mark them as newtypes; these abilities lead to the identification of this group (as “newtypes” in the Universal Century timeline, and “coordinators”³¹ or “innovators”³² in other timelines). While episode twenty-five of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* is strangely titled “The Sound of a Newtype” (*Nyūtaipu no oto*),³³ other than this reference (in episode twenty-five or in the show entirely) newtypes neither exist nor are mentioned by any character. In addition, the psychic powers

³¹ As appearing in *Mobile Suit Gundam Seed* (*Kidō senshi Gandamu shīdo*, 2002)

³² As appearing in *Mobile Suit Gundam 00* (*Kidō senshi Gandamu daburu 0*, 2007)

³³ From *Gundam: Reconguista in G* (2014), episode 23.

attributed to newtypes neither manifest nor are referenced in any dialogue or exposition. With the complete removal of this fundamental motif, the 2014 series lacks the ability earlier series' had to illustrate the development of their characters (and mark the point at which they no longer needed their mecha) through their development as newtypes.

Contributing to the 2014 series' different treatment of characters is its treatment of sexuality. As with *Space Battleship Yamato*'s 2013 remake, the 2014 *Gundam: Reconguista in G* displays the same shifts in fan service and the presentation of female characters. While the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* vested much of its sexualization in the character Lieutenant Matilda and largely avoided the sexualization of young women (ages 15-18) aboard the White Base, *Gundam: Reconguista in G* contains numerous sexualized female characters. The Megafauna, the 2014 series' version of the White Base, is full of young soldiers and crew, including the characters of the main cast. While the 2014 series' festive atmosphere doesn't feel as over-sexed as some other contemporary anime, there are enough sexualized young characters to indicate that the series does embrace this kind of sexualization, which is characteristic of "Era of Animals" database consumption. Most noticeable is the female lead, Aida Surugan, who wears her pilot's uniform usually unzipped (revealing a form-fitting white jumpsuit underneath) and languidly zips it back up before combat in scenes emphasizing her sexuality. While this may appear tame by contemporary anime standards, visuals such as this were nearly nonexistent in the 1979 original.

The final battle of *Gundam: Reconguista in G* also clearly contrasts with to that of the original; instead of cementing a fictional grand narrative, it simply provides another opportunity to highlight affective elements. As many factions begin to vie for resources in the Earth sphere, Bellri and the crew of the Megafauna return to Earth to stop the growing violence, war soon

begins. Bellri uses his overwhelming power to destroy enemy mobile suits while leaving their pilots unharmed; his goal is to end the war without costing human life. During the battle, Bellri communicates to all forces that he “won’t fight anymore,”³⁴ and implies the meaninglessness of their conflict. Rapidly after this declaration the battle simply ends with no other discernable cause, with all factions laying down their arms. The series concludes with an epilogue showing that all the characters have not only survived but become friends,³⁵ and that the Earth sphere is at peace once again. The final battle of the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* was undergirded by the themes of coming-of-age, human evolution, political intrigue, and futile violence that clearly built into its grand narrative. However, the rapid and incoherent conclusion to *Gundam: Reconguista in G* simply creates a stage upon which the series’ huge cast can fight a number of set-piece battles which, due to the series’ rushed ending, lack thematic ties to the rest of the series and evidence the clear lack of a fictional grand narrative.

The 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam* used the “real robot” genre to construct a vast fictional grand narrative in which fans- through the mechanical details of the mobile suits, the political backdrop of the action, and the emphasis of character over mecha- could glimpse a vast fictional grand narrative of the One-Year War and the science-fiction universe that contextualized it. However, *Gundam: Reconguista in G* (while purporting to return the franchise to the Universal Century timeline of 1979) does away with nearly all of these core themes, and with them, the fictional grand narrative of *Mobile Suit Gundam* fades from view. Ultimately the show’s vague references to the 1979 world of the Universal Century fame seem ultimately meaningless to the series’ overall narrative, rendering it little more than a fictional grand narrative repackaged as an affective element deep within this postmodern “Era of Animals.”

³⁴ From *Gundam: Reconguista in G*, episode 26,

³⁵ Including characters who had formerly been bitter enemies or rivals.

CONCLUSION

Repackaging Aspects and Images

Fueled by the desire for grand narrative storytelling of the 1970s-1980s generation, the “Era of Fictions” became a fertile period for the production of anime displaying vast worldviews and grand narrative-style storytelling. However in the argument of Hiroki Azuma, building on that of Eiji Ōtsuka, the grand narratives of the “Era of Fictions” were artificial, fictionalized constructs. Designed to sate fan desire for grand narratives, these fictional narratives were mediated through the ‘small narratives’ of each episode, in an era in which true grand narratives were rapidly declining. These fictional grand narratives of the “Era of Fictions” became the core of a number of highly-influential anime series, such as the 1974 *Space Battleship Yamato* and the 1979 *Mobile Suit Gundam*.

As the timeline progressed and Azuma’s “Era of Animals” began in 1995, he argued that grand narrative storytelling had broken down entirely. The desire for grand narratives had been replaced by a desire for the small narratives themselves, and narrative consumers began to gain a broad understanding of a database of affective elements” from which all postmodern media (such as anime) were assembled. Fans began to consume anime not for the narratives in their backgrounds, but for their favored database-element combinations on the surface. In this new age of database consumption, not only had the old grand narratives disappeared, but so had their successors, the fictional grand narratives. As market forces and huge-scale consumption demand the production of more and more databasified animation, the results are clearly visible. The narrative complexity and richly-designed worlds of the “Era of Fictions” have given way to a seemingly-endless array of simulacra, media and characters designed not as unique individual unit but as assemblages of database elements.

However, the current historical moment has given rise to a number of significant returns to the media of the “Era of Fictions,” not the least of which are the new 2013 *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* and the 2014 *Gundam: Reconquista in G*. These new stories look similar to their original counterparts on the surface, but ultimately play host to a huge number of invasive affective elements which ultimately crowd out their old fictional grand narrative, relegating it to a position no grander than that of any other individual database element.

To draw out a powerful example of this overall phenomenon, the ‘beach episode’ of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* stands as a clear illustration. As mentioned earlier, at one point near the series’ conclusion the crew take a break on Iscandar, frolicking and playing in the planet’s crystal-clear sea as they await the Yamato’s departure. Beach episodes are not unique to *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*, and are very common among anime produced in the “Era of Animals.” As a scene it has no relation to the plot of the series, but rather is derivative from vast number of series involving beach episodes which predate it. The presence of the “beach episode” is a clear signifier of *Space Battleship Yamato 2199*’s place in the postmodern era. To see the steel-grey bulk of the Yamato relegated to the background of such a scene indicates that aspects and images of the fictional grand narrative of the Japanese experience of the Pacific War has been repackaged to become no more significant than the beach episode or any of the other affective elements which surround it. This aspect of the series, along with the other scenes, characters, settings, themes, and so forth that this thesis has referenced, affirms the new postmodern reality that grand narratives have been repackaged as database elements.

From this analysis, the answer to this thesis’ research question becomes clear. In the case of “Era of Fictions” fictional grand narratives, when they are updated to the “Era of Animals” they do not disappear entirely. Rather, some superficial aspects and images of these original

fictional grand narratives are maintained deep within the “Era of Animals,” accessing the associated emotional resonance and nostalgia, but as such becoming repackaged as little more than database elements.

Intersections

The two franchises analyzed for this thesis, *Space Battleship Yamato* and the *Gundam* franchise, do show significant variation between their fictional grand narratives. *Space Battleship Yamato*, the fictional grand narrative of which is based in reality, seems to have retained more of the aspects and images of its fictional grand narrative in its remake than *Gundam: Reconguista in G* did. While this analysis is not the subject of this thesis, it is likely that the connection to reality- to the effects of a war still deeply felt today- may keep *Space Battleship Yamato 2199* slightly more grounded in its fictional grand narrative past. Akiko Hashimoto notes that today “Japan [is] at the crossroads of becoming a ‘normal country’- a nation possessing the full capability to wage war” over seventy years after the end of the war, and that this process “embodies a question of basic national credo and identity” (Hashimoto 2015: 120). As a nation interrogates its core national identity, this may be an ideal time for a return- even a slight one- to the grand narrative.

Takekawa notes “the Yamato would perhaps come back to popular culture again and again when artists find the nation facing a crisis” (Takekawa 2012: 16). While it is clear that the Yamato that returned to popular culture was not the same vessel laden with epic significance that rose from the earth in 1974, it did return. The return of *Space Battleship Yamato* invaded by database elements is a signifier of the postmodern era but it does not preclude the existence of “crisis,” in Takekawa’s words. Takekawa’s “crisis” and Hashimoto’s “question of basic national

credo,” regarding the possible rearmament of Japan, may be the same phenomenon. As Japan moves forward on its path to becoming a “normal country,” and media moves deeper into the “Era of Animals,” there will be exciting new intersections between Japan’s political development and media, between history and postmodernity.

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